

October 18, 2004

White House Conference on Aging Statement
The Alabama Department of Senior Services
P. O. Box 301851
Montgomery, AL 36130-1851

Dear Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of older adults who are also adults in need of protective services. Although many areas of service to older adults have been strengthened, adult protective services have not been strengthened.

In Alabama, the Alabama Department of Human Resources provides adult protective services, including protective services to elderly persons. As the Director of the program, I have seen the number of case managers assigned to the program shrinking since the mid 1990's, as the focus of my Department has, because of a child welfare lawsuit, become the reform of child welfare practice. Out of necessity, limited financial resources for social services were allocated to child welfare programs. Because there was little or no increase in State funding, funding to support the reform was taken from existing programs with Adult Protective Services being particularly hard hit. Direct services available to older adults in need of protection have also shrunk. Both case manager and service availability have reached a critical point. In many situations, older adults are placed in nursing homes at Medicaid's expense because in-home services are not available and nursing home care is the only federally funded care available.

Title XIX and the General Fund of the State fund the Adult Protective Services (APS) program in Alabama. Title XIX targeted case management reimbursement makes up only approximately 13% of the APS budget. The rest is State money. No Title XX Social Service Block Grant money is directed toward APS nor is any Administration on Aging funding.

In FY 04, the Department of Human Resources received 4958 reports of suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of adults who were said to be unable to protect themselves and who had no one to protect them. Of these approximately 5,000 adults, 61% were 55 or older, 49% were 65 or older, and 2% were very old or 95 or older. The Department of Senior Services Ombudsmen, who are mandatory reporters under Alabama law, reported approximately 13 cases of suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation. This data represents real people who need real help.

Direct services provided by DHR primarily include Homemaker, Day Care, Foster Care, Emergency Shelter, Case Management, and Mental Health Counseling. Funding for these direct services has also declined since the mid 1990's. An individual in need of homemaker service may only receive 2 hours of service per week where 4 or more hours are needed. Several adult day care centers have closed because of low payment (approximately \$11.50 per day) or because the number of individuals for whom the Department of Human Resources can pay has been cut in half.

Following are just a few case examples of the kinds of abuse, neglect, and exploitation occurring in Alabama.

1. A 76-year-old male who has possible early Alzheimer's Disease was living in a relationship with a younger abusive female. Although several reports were made to law enforcement, the abuse continued. Through a DHR investigation and subsequent report to the District Attorney, an arrest has been made and the adult protected. The extended family has become involved in his future care.
2. The Department of Human Resources received a call from a hospital regarding an elderly man, Mr. P, who was abused by his son. Mr. P's injuries included hypothermia and severe bruising on his body. The left side of his chest was so swollen, the hospital had to do surgery to drain fluid from the injuries. Mr. P admitted that his son physically abused him and told him to report his injuries as being from falls. The son admitted he became very angry when his father made mistakes. In particular, he revealed anger when his father did not sit up straight at the table. He further admitted that he had hit his father with the back of his hand, his fist, and a clothing rod from a closet. Mr. P was alert and capable of making his own decisions. With DHR assistance, he moved into an assisted living facility after his discharge from the hospital. He has permanent nerve damage to his hands from fending off the blows from his son. The son was sentenced to 10 years on a second-degree assault charge and 15 years on the charge of adult abuse with a serious injury.
3. Another County Department of Human Resources investigated a report regarding elderly Ms S who was being locked in her home, receiving only one meal per day and often being left for days while her daughter and son-in-law, the caregivers, went to the beach. The investigation found the reported incidents to be true. The worker removed Ms S from her home via the Adult Protective Service Act and placed her in a hospital for an evaluation. She was subsequently moved to a nursing home and has remained there. Both the daughter and son-in-law were indicted by the Grand Jury on criminal charges and guilty verdicts were returned on all counts.
4. Mrs. B, an 85-year-old, entered the hospital in a filthy condition covered with feces and urine, maggots in her hair and in her vaginal area and decubitus ulcers on her inner thighs. The floors of her house were covered with both cat and human urine and feces. Mrs. B. shared her home with her mentally ill 49 year-old son. DHR obtained a court order to remove the mother from the home and place her in a local nursing home.

These individuals needed help and they needed it immediately! Currently, eight County Department of Human Resources offices have no Adult Protective Services case worker to receive and investigate reports. In these Counties, a variety of staff positions may respond to adult abuse, neglect, and exploitation reports. These individuals have other full-time responsibilities and little or no training in Adult Protective Services. Alabama's older citizens deserve better treatment by our government.

For those counties having staff assigned to Adult Protective Services, caseloads may far exceed the number recommended by the National Adult Protective Services Administrators Association. The recommended caseload is 25. Alabama's average is 45 cases per worker.

What can be done to remedy this situation?

1. Enactment of the Elder Justice Act requiring coordination between federal programs and adequate funding of Adult Protective Services programs.

2. Allow Adult Protective Services programs to apply for Administration On Aging funds currently designated only for the State Unit on Aging.
3. Establish caseload standards and training requirements for Adult Protective Services workers.
4. Designate Adult Protective Services as a priority area of service for existing community programs such as the Elder and Disabled Waiver program.
5. Allocate Federal funds for in-home services, specifically for individuals who are at risk of abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Thank you for this comment opportunity. I will be happy to provide additional information as needed.

Sincerely,

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